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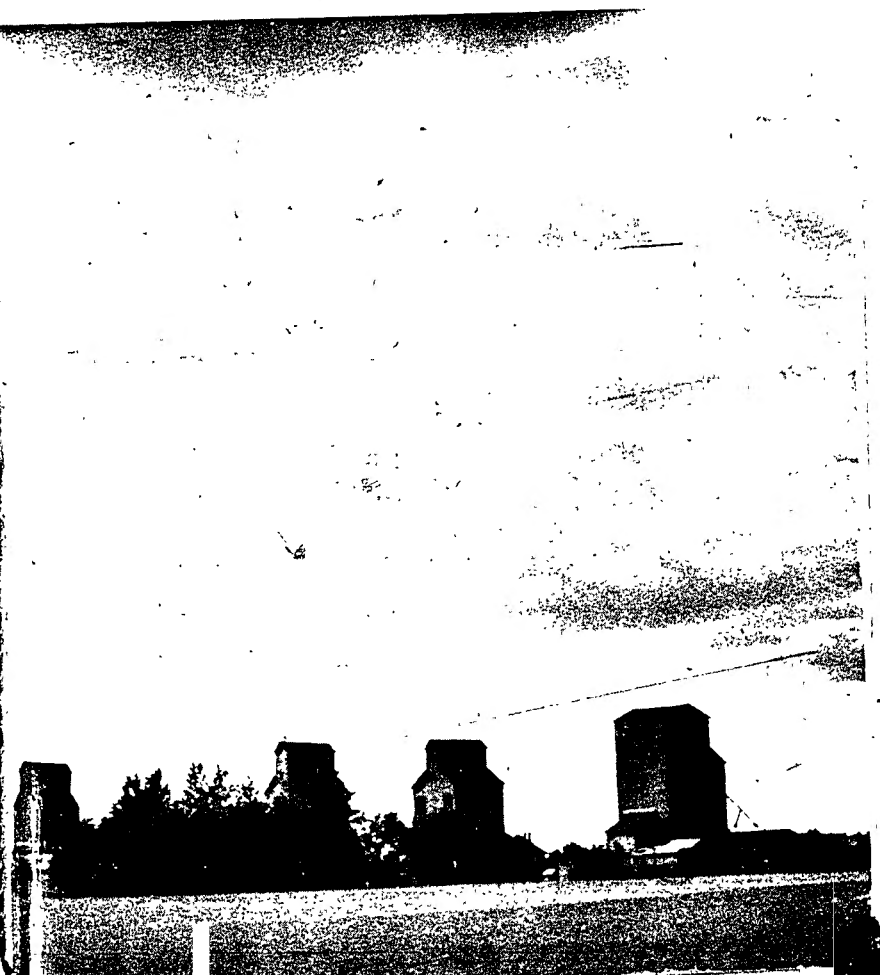


THE UNIVERSITY OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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PRAIRIE SKYLINE



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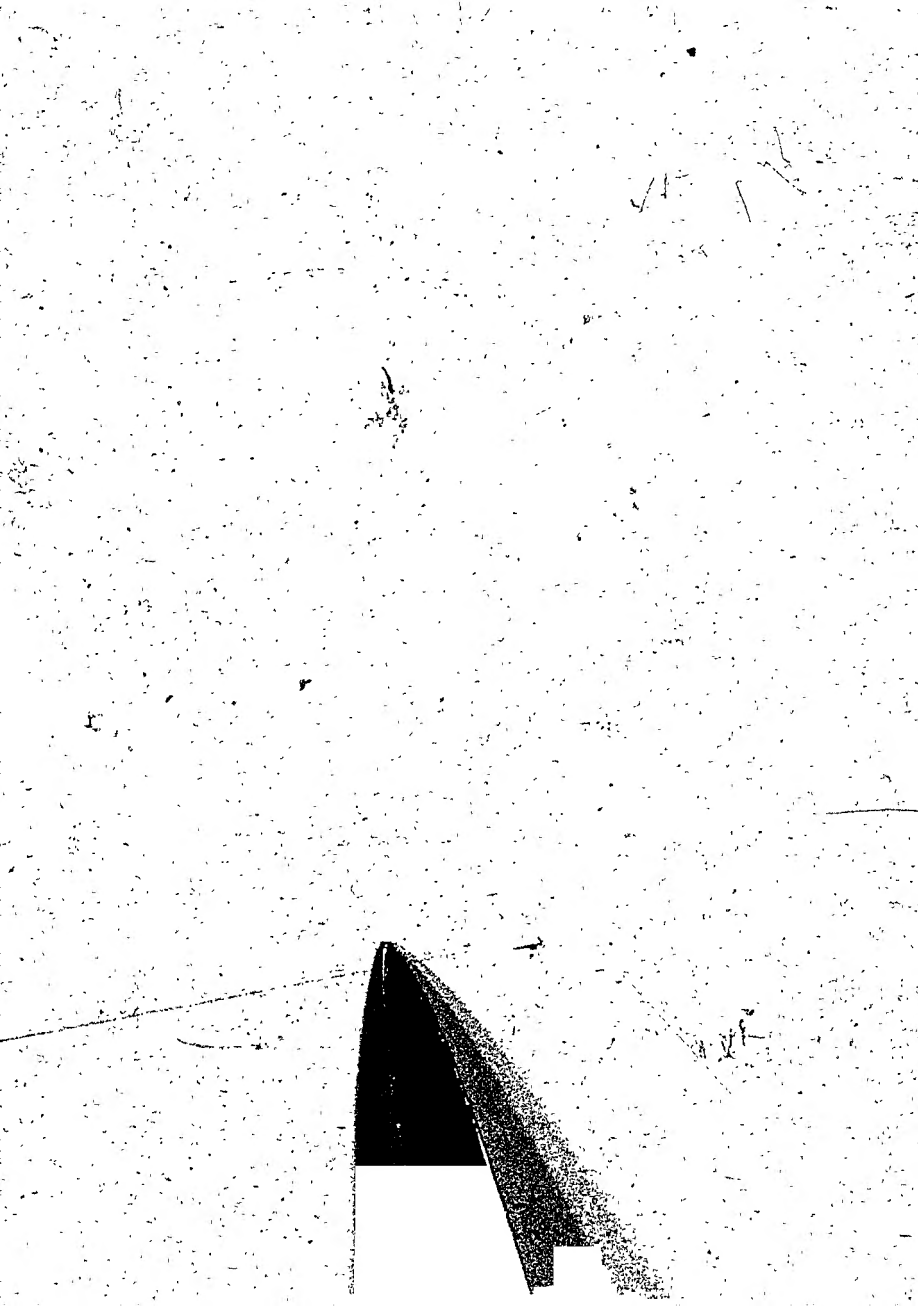
DEDICATION

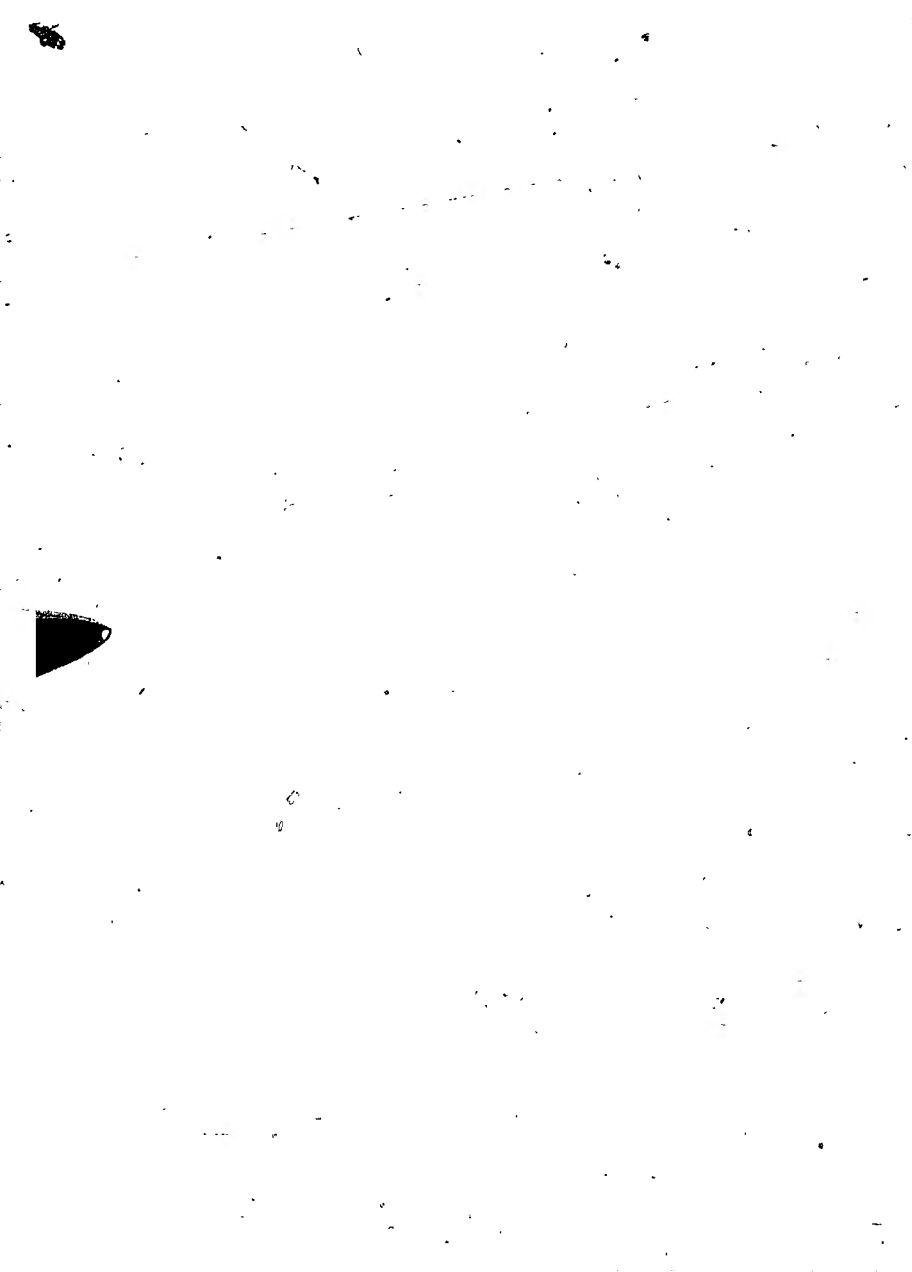
This book is affectionately dedicated to those who encouraged our first efforts—Our Parents.

COVER

The typical prairie scene on the cover was photographed by Mr. T. Melville-Ness.

a





PRAIRIE SKYLINE

by

Enid and Vesta Pickel



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Regina, Saskatchewan,
Canada



CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction	1
<i>Poems by Enid M. Pickel</i>	
Prairie Born	3
April Upon The Plain	4
The Land of Manitou	5 & 6
Spring Morning	7
Rain In The Night	7
Spring Evening	8
The Spring Will Come Again	9
The Wide Land	11
Wind In The Trees	12
The Calling Winds	12
Meadow Mist	13
Sóliloquy	13
Horses At Play	14
Prairie Bouquets	15
To A Barn Swallow	17
The Prairie Is Never Alone	17
Home Holiday	18
Specimen (The Dragon-fly)	20
Home Horizon	21
Amid Acres	23
Farewell Saskatchewan	26
Bread	30
Night At The Barn	32 & 33
November	34
Canadian Painting (Sombre Day)	36
Canadian Painting (Frosty Tree)	37
Blizzard	38
Prairie Weather	40

CONTENTS—Continued

PAGE

Poems by Vesta Pickel

The Robin	3
Silhouette	4
May Night	8
Lovely Spring	8
Prairie Voices	9
East and West	10
Prairie Night	16
The Vagabond	16
Poppies In The Wind	18
Canada	19
Berry Time	19
Vacation At Waskesiu	20
Qu'Appelle In Summer	22
The Moose Mountains	24
September Day	25
Sunset On Wascana	25
Time of Harvest	26
The Changing Scene	27
Song For September	28
Poplar Smoke	29
A Time To Dream	29
Indian Summer	30
How Can I Capture Beauty?	31
Autumn	31
It Is November Now	33
Life Cycle	34
Snow In The Night	35
Night Wind	35
Frosty Morning	36
Winter Scene	37
At Fort Qu'Appelle	39

Per Copy 50c Vesta Pickel

2514 A — 15th Ave., Regina, Sask.

INTRODUCTION

Prairie Skyline comes to you with poetic pictures of the Prairie, comprising the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. To those who love the Prairie we hope it will recall many pleasant memories of this great wide land.

* * *

Of U. E. Loyalist ancestry, the authors are prairie born.

Enid M. Pickel was born at Midale, Saskatchewan, and took her schooling in various towns in the province. She attended Normal School in Regina and taught school at Rock Glen, Darmody, Scotsguard, Tyner, Gray, Tyvan, and Regina. Her poems have appeared in the Saskatchewan Poetry Book, Winnipeg Free Press, Regina Leader-Post, Alberta Poetry Year Book, Grenfell Sun, The Poet's Library (Vols. 9 and 10) and the Canadian Home Journal. She is the wife of a farmer, Thomas L. Kinney, of Souris, Manitoba. They have one daughter, Gaye.

Vesta Pickel was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and after her schooling in several towns in the province, she attended the Reliance School of Commerce in Regina. She is a stenographer for a wholesale automotive firm there. Her poems have been printed in the Saskatchewan Poetry Book, Regina Leader-Post, Winnipeg Free Press, The Counsellor, Author's Signpost, Grenfell Sun, Indian Head News, Saskatchewan Commonwealth, and the Alberta Poetry Year Book.



Prairie Born

Every land has a charm
For the man who is native there.
The mountains surpass the sea,
But the gusty Atlantic air
Is music and life and home
To the lads who seaward fare.

So take not from me the land
Where the clouds and winds adorn
The loveliest sight I have ever seen,
Wide miles of sky over waving green
On a June and sun-filled morn;
This land where I was born!

The Robin

Here is the pioneer of spring,
Spirit of the prairie.
Not gorgeous as the Blue Bunting,
Oriole, Cardinal;
Or sober as a Sparrow,
His sturdy chest expands with assurance
That he is well dressed.
His voice will be heard from early dawn
Insisting
He has something to tell
Worth hearing.
Pools of water
Reflect bare limbs and a gray, cold sky,
But a robin,
High on a swaying branch,
Proclaims it is spring.

April Upon the Plain

When April comes to the plain
She sweeps the earth's brown tile
With rain, her silver-stranded broom,
Completely clean.
To a mirror sheen
Shines each pool,
A looking glass for the clouds to pass;
And raking the faded yellow grass
With her four-pronged wind,
More sensed than seen
Hears a hint of green,
The pulse of a thousand stirring things.
A strangely immortal song she sings,
April,
Upon the plain.

Honorable Mention. Free Verse Class,
1948 Alberta Poetry Book.

SILHOUETTE

When April smiles the prairie rim is wide,
And clustered cotton balls are in the sky.
A springtime silhouette to passerby—
The tractor, man and plow—these three provide
For circling gulls as up the field they ride
And in their wake the darkened furrows lie,
Releasing from the soil its food supply
And pungent odours quickly coincide.

With faith the farmer cultivates once more.
His face and hands are rough and weather tanned.
The tedium and dirt he does not shrink.
There is a joy in seeking to restore.
He puts new life and love into the land
And more than food is his for all his work.

The Land of Manitou

This is a strange land!

Listen!

Manitou is beating on his drum.

"This hammer head
Will make the stop
You wished to prop against the door."

"How truly made!"

Manitou is beating,
Beating on his war drum,
Beating, beating, beating,
Till the air around
Throbs with his beating!
Beating, till his war drum,
Like a giant's pulse,
Fills the land with sound.

Listen!

Manitou is beating on his drum.

"Five coyotes
From their den I dug
Ten precious coyotes' ears!"
A supple red-skinned hand
Writes delicately
"Section, township, range."

Manitou is beating
Through the sun-filled morning,
Beating, beating, beating.
In a blue hill cave.
Beating on his war drum,
Baffled, muffled, beating,
Throbbing in the distance
For the last red brave.

Listen!

Manitou is beating on his drum.

"These arrow heads
I found upon that hill —
Perhaps a battleground—
Here is a fine one.
See how sharp the edge."

Manitou is beating,
Beating on his war drum,
Beating, beating, beating,
Calling to his land
With a phantom war drum
Over moon-filled meadow.
Beating on the hilltop
For a tribe's last stand.

Listen!

Manitou is beating on his drum.

A skin tepee
In the meadow,
Curling pale smoke
From a dry wood fire
Makes bands across the twilight.

Oh copper hands
Gathering seneca,
This is a strange land!

Listen!

Manitou is beating on his drum.

Note: "Section, township, range"—location of den had to be stated in order to collect the bounty for coyotes' ears offered by the Municipality of Glenwood, Souris, Man.

Spring Morning

Oh Meadow Lark!
Fluting
From the tip
Of the world's
First green morning—

Throated with gold
And velvet—
Loan me your livery
For a day,
That I may sing
My spirit
An enchantment.
Oh Meadow Lark!

Rain in the Night

The first spring rain
In the night
Taps gently on my pane.
At last
The rain!
Listen
To the song of the rain
In the night,
The refrain;
"Tomorrow,
In the lane,
Snow-white anemones will look up
With a crystal note of the rain
In each cup."

Spring Evening

A slim poplar,
Shivering,
In her filmy gown of golden ribbons
Borrowed from the sunset,
Reaches
To draw her shawl of purpled cloud
More closely,
On a far
And faintly greening hill,
Awaiting
The first star.

May Night

Long ago
I remember the spring air.
Vibrant
With zooming of night hawks,
And crickets;
The stirring of curtains at my window;
And the music of frogs
On their little accordians.
Always melodious.

Lovely Spring

Exquisite Spring, oh most sublime,
If you can overlook the slime,
~~The sodden streets, the leaden skies~~
And gaunt gray limbs without disguise.
The whining wind that clutches you
And leaves you feeling numb right through.
Your rubbered feet and spotted hose,
And all those old wet-weather clothes—
Write finis to this tale of woes.
It's Spring!

The Spring Will Come Again

The Spring will come again with silver rain,
Like elfin bells that tinkle in the night,
Across the chill and snowy fields of white,
And tap with gentle fingers at my pane;
And I shall wake to hear the rill again,
The whirr of wings from birds in endless flight.
And see the earth reclothed from winter's night,
And know that Spring has come upon the plain.

And I shall drink the fragrant smell of sod,
Like rich warm wine that holds a rosy dream,
And wake to find my soul atune with God
Rejoicing in each bud and flower and stream;
And feel my feet like Mercury's, wing-shod
For every task that once did weary seem.

Awarded a prize in the Poets' Library,
Arthur Stockwell Anthology, London, England.

Prairie Voices

I'll answer the call of a friendly trail
When the prairie wakens in May,
To the rousing trill of the meadow lark
While the morning light is pearl gray,
When the lavender crocus is fast asleep,
And before the pussies have dared to peep
From their glossy green willow covers.

I'll follow the trail over valley and plain,
Through sunshine and rain everywhere.
I'll sing the songs of the prairie folk
While the wind plays a tune in my hair.
I'll wander as long as the voices call
Till the sloughs are rimed and the sere leaves fall;
Then I'll dream through the winter weather.

EAST and WEST

Back from the hills and the valleys,
Away from the rivers and woods,
Away from the mist and the wood smoke
Where the scene in the distance is blurred.

Beauty cannot be denied—
Every landscape a dream;
Trees and lakes,
Bridges and spires.
Each elm a poem in itself.

Can there be too much beauty?

Here is no sea,
No tidal rivers coming and going,
No surfeit of valleys and trees
Or winding roads;
No vast stretches of water,
Ships at a wharf
Or dulce in the storekeeper's window.

Here nothing is old,
The West is so new;
Hours of sunshine,
Nights crystal blue.

Give me this land with the limitless view.

The Wide Land

The wide land, the wide land
Oh never can I be
Away from the wide land
But it keeps calling me!
The wide sky, the wide earth,
The wide winds that roam,
The long trails in the wide land
Keep calling me home!

The rivers of the wide land
Have names, each like a song,
Saskatchewan, Assiniboine,
Proudly they flow along.
Bow and Athabasca,
Souris, Peace, Qu'Appelle.
Their murmur in the spring land
Holds me like a spell.

The wide land, the wide land
Oh never can I be
Away from the wide land
But it keeps calling me!
The wide sky, the wide earth
The wide winds that roam,
The long trails in the wide land
Keep calling me home!

Oh all the ribbon roadways
That lead across the plain
Past farmhouse, past schoolhouse,
Past Midale and McLean
Turn me to the wide land!
Down lanes of voice and light
Each highway leads me to a star
In the wide land at night.

Wind in the Trees

The sound of Seven Seas is at my door,
Murmuring,
And lapping the green shore of my yard,
Slapping, sobbing, breaking roar-on roar.

Rolling, pleading, whispering at the door
Of my prairie home,
The grove that never saw the shore,
Like a great shell,
Echoes the sea.

The Calling Winds

Oh the winds are ever calling,
Ever calling, calling me,
The North Wind and the South Wind
And the East Wind from the sea,
And the West Wind in the grasses
Calls and ever calls to me.

Oh whither shall I follow,
Ever calling, calling me,
The North Wind or the South Wind,
Or the East Wind from the sea?
Or the West Wind in the grasses,
Calling, ever calling me?

Oh I hear the four winds calling,
Ever calling, calling me,
The North Wind and the South Wind,
And the East Wind from the sea,
But the West Wind in the grasses
Ever calls from home to me!

Meadow Mist

The meadow trees lie islanded in mist.
Stillness

Drowns the low of cattle

On some farther strand.

And I, Columbus-like, from kitchen deck

Sight the strong corn

And garden sunflowers

Floating to greet me,

As upon that morn,

And all a continent is newly born.

Note: "That morn" refers to Columbus seeing
the floating branch.

SOLILOQUY

(To Deer Feeding on Oats)

Here you come,

Walking nimbly across the pasture,

Pausing,

For a nibble here and there,

But not for long.

You know quite well

The location of tender young oats

And the fence,

But what's a fence to a deer?

Up and over!

Your white tails flash me a signal,

If I care to heed it.

"Now see here velvet friends

This is feed for the year."

Your large eyes stare.

What artist wouldn't change places with me

To share ownership of the oats

With such company!

Horses at Play

White feet twinkle in patter time
To white faces nodding a rhythmic rhyme.

White feet and white faces swing together
Across the lush field, in the summer weather.

Now they're on top of a low green hill,
Smokey and Suzie, Jean and Jill.

Dark manes ripple as bold winds pass.
Dark tails wave with the prairie grass.

A moment's pause, and then they race
With the flying clouds at breakneck pace,

Baldy and Flossie, Jack, and Jess,
Belle, May and Barney, Fly and Bess.

Watering time, and set of sun,
White feet come twinkling one by one,

White faces nod, and dark tails fly,
Dark manes float out from heads held high.

Embroidered steeds on a cloth of gold
From a battle tapestry rare and old.



Prairie Bouquets

Down ~~any~~ grassy prairie trail
I'll pass the anxious bee
When white and gold and purple
I pick the asters three,

And gather of the susans
With black black eyes of fun,
A bouquet for my window sill
When prairie day is done.

The harebells and wild millet
With green and azure grace
Make shadows from the mantel
As dainty as frail lace.

There on a low buffet,
In sunset color rich,
The regal orange lilies
Are veiled in heads of witch.

And centering my table,
Short spikes of blue-beard-tongue
With fragrant prairie roses
Seem beautiful, each one.

A grass,
A weed,
A wildflower,
Each with a special charm,
Embroiders with its beauty
My home upon the farm.

Prairie Night

Give me a night with a moon swung low,
A bright full moon or a hunter's bow;

A prairie night and a prairie moon,
With the bull-frogs sawing a fiddle tune.

From the grassy banks of the wandering creek,
When the sage-covered plain is a silver streak;

And the air is laden with clover and mint,
Sweet grass, alfalfa, and maybe a hint

Of the grey wolf willow—all these and more
Are gifts at the prairie dweller's door.

The Vagabond

I long to be a vagabond,
When gypsy winds are blowing;
A modern traveller of the road
When gleam of gold is showing
Across the fields of waving grain,
And all the world is growing.

I long to be a vagabond,
When summer suns are streaming,
And robins, wrens and meadow larks
Are in the country teeming,
When every glade is flower-strewn,
And here I would be dreaming.

I long to be a vagabond,
When nights are warm, and shining
With half a million sleepy stars
And moonbeams intertwining;
Then in my tent in slumber deep,
I would not be repining.

To A Barn Swallow

Master of aviation,
Dipping to soar and survey
A world of verdant creation,
Wheeling and diving,
Your flight a lyric of motion,
Graceful,
Reflecting the light on jewelled breast
And wings metallicly bright,
My heart could do
With your wider view from the height.
But oh! like you,
I would find me a roof
At night.

The Prairie is Never Alone

The prairie is never alone,
For always there is the light
Of the stars and little towns
Twinkling in the night.

Milestone, Wilcox and Lang,
Corinne, Riceton and Gray;
Moose Jaw, like a big glow-worm
On the line between night and day;
And the signs in Regina glitter
Like the gems in a jeweller's tray.

The prairie is never alone,
For always there is the light
Of the stars and little towns,
Twinkling in the night.

Poppies in the Wind

There is another place where poppies grow,
A hidden spot that beauty seekers know.
Surrounded by the rockies, facing ice;
These poppies signify no sacrifice
Of blood, or tears, or war; and yet
It will be long before I shall forget
Those lovely petals—orange, white and gold;
For locked secure, my memory will hold
The picture of a glacier, lake, fir trees,
And poppies in the wind at Lake Louise.

Home Holiday

I would not travel on this summer day
Much farther than to look beyond my door
To holiday in mountains, glacier capped,
Or ripple emerald water by the shore,
Or drink a more invigorating air,
Or pluck an orchid in some distant place,
Or walking softly through a forest aisle
Find a more pleasing symmetry of grace.

I would not travel on this summer day
Much farther than to look upon the sky,
Where mountain pinnacles of purest snow
Sail and re-sail forever, softly by.
An emerald sea is rippling at my feet
With silver edged waves of oaten grain;
And the brown fallow breathes a sweet
Incense of washed earth, after sudden rain.

And underneath a murmuring poplar tree,
Where sun and wind are making a fine lace
Of light and shade upon the singing grass,
A dandelion lifts a golden face!

CANADA.

Canadian—it has a vibrant sound—
It is the whirling wheels of industry,
The deafening roar of drilling underground.
It is the rhythmic surf-beats of the sea;
The singing whine of saws, the bleat of sheep,
Dull click of oarlocks, and the shriek of trains,
The thunder in Niagara's mighty leap,
The golden rush of wheat and lesser grains.

The ballad of a nation, strong and young,
These are her songs of greatness, wealth and might.
Let not her fearless spirit go unsung,
Her star in world affairs is strangely bright.
O Canada, O land of many songs,
Sing of the peace that triumphs over wrongs.

Honorable Mention, Sonnet Class,
1947 Alberta Poetry Book.

Berry Time

Time for berry picking
When the year is at July.
Clustered purple sphericles
Hanging low and high.
Luscious tangy Saskatoons,
Natural prairie fruit.
Watchful blackbirds chide us
Taking treasured loot.


Satisfaction fills us
When we top our large tin cup,
Empty into picking pail,
View it coming up.
Visions of ripe berries—
Sealers—juicy pies,
Speed us to be active
Before the daylight dies.

SPECIMEN

(The Dragon-fly)

Breathing the outer air
Through an appendage
Of fine filaments,
It hangs head-downward
In a jar
Of half-translucent
Brown
Slough water,
Like fossil cased in amber.
Can this grotesque
Dragon-like affair
Be a bright creature,
Bronze-green or copper,
Turquoise or golden,
Eyes glistening,
Its wings spun-glass on filigree?

This is the jewelled brooch
July days wear,
To pin in graceful folds
The prairie air.



Vacation at Waskesiu

Bathed by the moonbeams of a million years
The lonely stretch of whitened beach appears
Veiled in a sudden splendor—silver mist
And moving shadows on the water twist.

Against the ragged tips of aged spruce
Brushes the silhouette of a wild goose,
Winging its way in quiet easy flight,
Over familiar route into the night.

The dulcet wash of wave on polished sand
Murmurs a song to all the wooded land;
And in my heart there echoes evermore,
The beauty of a northern lake and shore.

Home Horizon

Take me away from these mountains
Iced with glittering snow,
For I see blue prairie hills
Cloud-pinnacled, aglow
With purple and rose of the lingering sun
After the prairie day is done.
Take me away!

Take me away from this forest
Deep, pine-scented and cool.
I see three poplars stand
At the side of a prairie pool.
Three poplars, that whisper and drowse together
With the knee-deep cows, in the August weather.
Take me away!

Take me away from the wide sea,
For these green waves edged with foam
Bring to me other waves
On the prairie fields back home.
Silver and green and golden grain
Of oats, wheat and rye rippling on the plain.
Take me away!

Away from cold grey buildings
And the screech of the city street,
Grain elevators call me
Where prairie people meet.
Where the long red freight goes rolling by
Streaming a ribbon across the sky
There, let me be.

Qu'Appelle in Summer

What valley could be lovelier than Qu'Appelle!

Indented hillsides filled with light and shade,

Their beauty ever holds me in a spell

Beholding all the landscape God has made.

Each season of the year could be portrayed

In terms of splendour had I words to tell

The different dress with which it is arrayed.

What valley be lovelier than Qu'Appelle!

Lake water softly lapping cannot quell

The tide of peace, nor is it soon dismayed

By echoes sweeping from a schoolhouse bell.

Indented hillsides filled with light and shade!

No rough or ragged hills are here displayed.

The line of each is smooth, and every dell

And lake is patterned as in rare brocade.

Their beauty ever holds me in a spell.

The willows by the winding stream excel

In growth, and hide the eggs a duck has laid

With natural confidence that all is well,

Beholding all the landscape God has made.

My memories of it will never fade,

Though in some distant country I should dwell.

Where breezes make symphonic serenade

To every whitecap on the lake's low swell,

What valley could be lovelier!

AMID ACRES

She took each day and lived it as it came,
In simple quietude—
Her household tasks
Lay limply on her shoulders as her gown,
Oblivious to worry and to rush,
Doing the things that fragile hands could try,
Nor seeking to accomplish the undone.
Delighting in the visit of a friend,
Wild flowers that blossomed at her front doorstep,
Or fashioning a cake.
And all the while she moved about the house
Her gaze would stop before the kitchen shelves.
Plain boards they were,
And curtained full as plain,
But patterned with a dozen sprigs of verse,
Like summer flowers in a cheerful chintz,
Pinned on in gladsome random,
Like designs.
And every time she passed she picked a tune
To sing half-consciously within her mind.
Then on a day of neighbors' gathering
To talk and sew for worthy charities,
She was there too,
And none would rise to go
Until she had recited of her rhymes.
Perhaps they hungered for forgotten songs
Lost in the toil of living;
Or perhaps,
They saw her, amid acres, bushels, dimes.

The Moose Mountains

This is a restful place—
A century ago
The wooded hills held prairie chicken,
Partridge, deer.
The lakes made this a paradise
And moose were native here.

Picture him
Standing in shallow water,
Scanning the waking world with quiet gaze,
Only the water
Dripping from his roughened hide
Disturbing the silence.
Presently
The squirrels start their noisy chatter,
The birds cheep and trill
Their morning song.
And having drunk his fill
He moves on.

Today
This denizen is gone.
And here
On sandy beach,
Beside a lake whose mirrored depths
Reflect encircling trees,
The toiler finds his rest.

September Day

Spiced with a hint of tang, the morning wakes.
The sunbeams kiss the transient rainbowed dew.
An infant breeze arising, knots and shakes
The taffy tassels on the corn anew.

O'er stubbled saffron fields, a smoky veil
Reflects the glinting tones of earth and skies,
While bronze and golden leaves on every trail,
Breathe secrets to the winds with their goodbyes.

When this moon wanes and dies, will you remember
The amber loveliness of this September?

Sunset on Wascana

Over waters of Wascana
Sailboats glide on summer evenings;
Triangles of white reflecting
Shaded rose and orchid streamers
From the pastel prairie sunset.

On the south bank of Wascana
Leafy glades are cool, inviting
You to stop, relax and picnic;
Watch the zenith and the fading
Loveliness transform the prairie.

Dusky mauve on dancing ripples,
Patterned by the playful zephyr
That sets all the leaves confiding
Tales of love and secrets whispered,
Shadows fall upon Wascana.

Farewell Saskatchewan

— Farewell Saskatchewan,
I shall not come
Until you count another crocus time,
'To drink your special brew of too much sun,
Sky, and vast fields
Where too-bold winds have run.
But I shall take this cup of earthen-stone
To place upon my mantel, like a shell,
And sipping from it, hear as some far bell,
All the familiar music
I have known.

Note: "Cup of earthen-stone" refers to the
current copy of the "Sask. Poetry Book."

Time of Harvest

Heat, and the sound of the binders,
The monotone of the reapers
Chiding the horses,
Mindful of work on the morrow.
Nearby stand the cows in deep water,
Leisurely chewing.
An engine, and water pumping,
Around the bend in the road;
And small wild ducks in the water,
Timid at first, and then eager,
Rushing through reeds to the shore.
Lull in the sound of the cutting,
As the reapers pause, it is noontide,
Breathless calm of the day;
Only the cracking of brown pods
On the caraganas above
And their shower of seeds,
Breaks the silence.
Beyond the green spruce and the willows,
The interlaced line of the poplars,
The blue of a summer sky,
And white clouds drifting slowly.

The Changing Scene

Saskatchewan is young,
But with the passing years
Changes have come
Since the first settlers came and planted grain—
One precious bag of wheat—
And reaped
When summer days were done,
Forty amber bushels,
That first harvest in Saskatchewan.

And in the years that fell
Upon each other
With gathering speed
Saskatchewan was filled
With heavy stooks
Dotting the stubbled land,
That stretched far as the eye could see,
Pure gold!
And when the harvesting was done,
Tall tepees of ochre-tinted straw
Patterned the skyline.

No more do golden hummocks stretch for miles.
The combine has replaced the threshing crew.
And gone is something of the early west
We loved and knew.

Song for September

Leaves,
Curling,
'Twirling,
Whirling leaves,
Hurrying,
Scurrying,
Worrying leaves—
Crinkled and crisp,
Scampering noisily,
Darting and dancing —

Ankle-deep leaves.
Withered and mellow,
Golden and yellow,
Ochre, crimson,
Wine-tinted,
Rust,
Amber and copper—
Vivid in the autumn sun
Or joyously celebrating
The fruit of earth's labor
In a wild dance of enchantment
With a pixie wind—

Leaves burning,
Smoke writhing and turning
In the violet air—
Incense to remember
The yesterdays—
Life's treasure spilled,
The sweet content of dreams fulfilled.
Song for September.

Poplar Smoke

White poplar smoke—my lone campfire
Burning dried leaves raises a spire.
Twisty wisps like a crooked wire
Vision the hopes that I desire.
Veils of gray and rose mount higher,
Burst into flame, but soon expire.

Fingers beckon to take a peep
Into a world where fancies creep.
Woodland incense, fragrant and deep,
Wreath me in dreams and help me keep
Faith in fantasy, put me to sleep,
Drug me with scent from this smouldering heap.

A Time to Dream

Along the avenue
The leaves are gone from the maples
But their fruit still clings,
Tinkling like wind-bells
In the breeze:

The giant poplar flaunts his wealth
Before the shiny green willow,
But lets only a few gold pieces
Slip from his hand,
As if he were reluctant to pay
The elves.

The elms,
In ochre dress and dark brown spines,
Epitomize all loveliness
Of autumn—
A time to dream.

BREAD

The low lights wind in a jewelled chain
To black towers under the moon,
Where a glow burns late.
The prairie freight
Pulls heavily east at noon.
The road leads down
From the prairie town
To the chug and the churn and the scream,
And the golden flow of the grain that waved
On a field intensely green.
The way is far
From a prairie star
The wind and the snow and the rain,
And a farmer loading his drill once more
On the brown and peaceful plain.
Someone the other side of the world,
Whose prayers are long unsaid,
From the blood and the bitterness of war,
Is thanking God for bread.

Indian Summer

Indian Summer came today.
Scarlet berries were in her hair.
Her eyes were smiling, her laugh was gay,
And she wore her cloak in a careless way,
Dusty and frayed, she did not care,
It only gave her a gypsy air.
Gathering sunshine—gold as wheat—
Rustling by, her sandaled feet
Scatter the leaves and a pheasant feather—
Souvenir of hunting weather.

How Can I Capture Beauty?

Why should I capture beauty when it lies
Profusely on this glowing autumn day—
A multiple of variegated dyes,
Along each curving hillside and highway?
There's beauty too in every little bay
Where rippling waves are merely happy sighs;
A bush of scarlet rose-hips is a gay
Attractive note, bewitching to my eyes.

But beauty is elusive and the wind
May overnight shake off the leaves of gold,
And rain may dull the brilliance and rescind
In one short hour this magic not half told.
How can I capture beauty—how secure
A treasury of dreams that will endure?

First Prize, Sonnet Class, 1947 Alberta Poetry Book.

AUTUMN

When I hear the honk of wild geese,
From the northland flying southward,
And I see the rich leaves falling,
To the earth from hand of Midas;
Then my thoughts go swinging backward,
Like the flight of birds at sundown,
Winging home.

When the silver of the moon-glow,
Changes to a sheen of copper,
And the pungent smell of wood-smoke
Lingers, quivers in my nostrils,
Then the whispers of the night wind,
Full of long forgotten laughter,
Croon to me.

Night at the Barn

Barney and Jean,
The white team,
Are enjoying a snack
Before bedtime.
But Bessie, the pony,
And very much of a lady,
Scorning such indiscretions,
Is neatly asleep
In her stall.
The white pigs
Snuggle
Closely together
In the new straw,
Each taking time
To get his nose
Properly tucked
Under the chin of his neighbor,
While the stray cat
Walks gingerly,
Hunting a place
For the night
Against their warm sides.
The white-faced calves
Lie on the gold straw,
Stupidly staring.
Neither asleep,
Nor awake;
But the little new calf
Stretches out,
Truly tired.
The red cows chew
In content
Warming the air.
Jimmy and Darky and Nigger
Still follow the farmer
With each forkful of feed,
Frolicking after each other.

Cap turns round and around
And finally lies down
In the hay.

At last

The big door is closed,

And the grove

Asleep in the darkness

Stirs,

Stretching her arm

In the shadows

Circling the barn,

While a low star

Twinkles away

Toward the house.

It is November Now

It is November now,

And the lean trees are sighing for the golden hours
Stolen from September.

I too would store away October's wealth

To gloat upon in leisure moments,

But my time was filled with hurrying steps

And I missed

The liquid amber of the autumn sun,

The odour of wet earth and sodden leaves,

And all the other magic of the fall —

It is November now.

Each harvest time seems lovelier than the last.

And therein lies the key to all my dreams;

I can look forward to

The rising of a new October moon

And I am glad, although.

It is November now.

Life Cycle

The year is in the bud and leaves unfold,
And summer opens up the silken bloom;
By autumn, all the fruit has turned to gold
And winter brings but memory of perfume.
How short a time from bud to barren tree,
And who recalls the beauty of the flower?
The splendor of the autumn tapestry
Is flung upon earth's screen for but an hour.

If this be life, what then about the soul
That shrivels after early springtime frost,
And will it ever reach the final goal,
Or is the soul's desire forever lost?
Life follows death throughout the changing years,
The soul will rise again—O shed no tears!

Prize Poem, Regina Art Centre Association, 1946.

November

There is a planting time
To fill the heart,
As the dark earth,
With future things.
A time of tending
And a gathering time
To sing, glad with the yield.
Time plans for yet another spring.
Surely the soul must pause
To think,
Make high resolve,
And to remember;
And so,
A time to dream
In the soft-footed stillness.
Of November.

Snow in the Night

Here are the footprints of man—
Shadows in white;
Breaking anew a path
Lost in the night.
Pioneers, they who were first
To enter a wilderness.
So are they who break trail,
After a snow.

Night-Wind

Oh a prairie night in a winter light
Is a night of crystal blue;
And the stars wink down on each prairie town
And cast a fluorescent hue.

The moon is bright on a prairie night
When the earth is wrapped in snow;
And the shadows race over frosted lace
When the wind bends the branches low.

There is something rare in the prairie air
When the earth is brittle and lean;
The smoke plumes high in the arc of sky
And is gone, for the wind sweeps clean.

Canadian Painting

(*Sombre Day*)

Nature was etching a scene
In black on white and grey,
The time I went down
To Brandon town
On a December day.

The poles were ebony
On a world of paper-white.
Against the line
Of the earth's confine
The sky was a wash off-white.

The bush was mantilla lace,
And the spruce in Cornwallis yard
I used to think
So green, were ink,
Like charred trees, stark and hard.

Nature wearily dropped her pen,
And sighing shook her head
At the dreary sight,
But suddenly bright
A farmer's truck was red!

Note: "Cornwallis"—rural school, south
of Brandon, Manitoba.

Frosty Morning

The sun still shines,
Though winter snows have silvered all the earth,
And frost on every stiffened limb is glistening white.
The cows no longer water at the pond,
But at the ice-bound trough
They drink their fill,
While sun-dogs stand on guard.

Canadian Painting

(*Frosty Tree*)

If I should go at last
To some far isle,
Where emerald trees sway gently
Or bow low
To rhythm of the Trades,
And every blade of grass
Is always green,
I would forego
Full half the world of beauty
That I know;
Losing the tinsel tracery of tree
Painting its purple shadow
On blue snow.

Winter Scene

The sunset pencils shadows on the snow,
A jig-saw cut of color in half-tone;
Snow-clotted shrubs and grasses are bent low,
While stiffened willows rub their limbs and moan;
But frosted wires set up a muffled ringing,
And chickadees are on the fences singing.

The road is pitted by the steel-shod hoofs
Of hoary horses with their jangling load;
The wind tears ragged smoke from village roofs
Of every white-capped large or small abode;
But from the creek a sound is emanating
Of happiness from care-free children skating.

BLIZZARD

The wind—
At his mountain organ
Composes tonight.
The treble coupler whines
On high pipes,
And now
A gusty crescendo wails away
Into a hiss.
Sharp splinters of snow and sound
Swirl-simultaneously
In ever increasing undulations.
A grand chord,
Augmented by basso,
Shatters the air!
And sudden inspiration
Hurries, breathless, intense,
To grasp and hold with hands
The elusive mind-notes,
Higher, louder, deeper!
Hours, hours, hours!
Pipes to full force.
Dawn—
Near sleep at the keys,
Bass coupler still deepens one note,
A groan of frustration.
For all labour,
All fury,
All frenzy,
Has failed to produce one tone
Bell clear,
And yet sometimes so near;
But always
Slipping off key into a snow-muffled moan—
Sonata of the wind!

At Fort Qu'Appelle

The hills are draped in velvet overnight.
Soft folds of snow have fallen at the base.
A sky of winter hue against the white
Reflects blue shadows in each hollow place.

The willow thickets lend their certain grace,
Bare red-brown reeds beneath the midday light,
Wind-swept and clean of every frosty trace.
The hills are draped in velvet overnight.

The valley hills present artistic sight.
Their sequined winter cloak does not efface
Each curving hillside in the sunshine bright.
Soft folds of snow have fallen at the base.

These hills are old and 'neath their close embrace
The little village, now historic site,
Rests patiently until spring's skies replace
A sky of winter hue against the white.

Beauty is here when winds of winter bite
And through the silver hills and gullies race;
The sunshine, blessing all with clear delight
Reflects blue shadows in each hollow place.

The whistle of a train through distant space
Echoes among the vales in tone so slight
That peace pervades the air, no sounds erase
The hush that falls with shadows of the night.
The hills are draped in velvet.

Prairie Weather

The flag unfurls in the morning air,
The red and the white and blue.
And girls and boys in a country school
Are learning the right and true,
The red on the map for Britain's land,
And six sevens are forty-two.

The road to the country school is sweet
With the scent of clover and brome.
The sky is a sea immensely blue
With galleons sailing home.
And the world is a patchwork coverlet.
Of green and gold with the loam.

The rains lash down in a silver sheet,
The sun burns ever higher.
The winds blow strong from the frigid North,
The frost has a sting like fire,
And girls and boys in a country school
Are building their hearts' desire.

The giant boats and the tossing foam
And the far seas break the tether;
But you'll know the man from the prairie school
For the sturdy step, together
With the clear-eyed look and the hearty clasp
And the stamp of the prairie weather.

